

ICANN Hires Former Cybersecurity Chief as New CEO

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[1]The Internet agency with key oversight of the monikers behind every Web site, e-mail address and Twitter post named former U.S. cybersecurity chief Rod Beckstrom Friday as its next chief executive.

The board of the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers approved his hiring in a voice vote Friday as ICANN capped weeklong meetings in Sydney, Australia. Beckstrom becomes CEO next Wednesday.

Beckstrom, who had resigned after less than a year as cybersecurity director amid persistent turf battles, brings credentials in industry, government and diplomacy — but little direct experience with domain names and broader Internet addressing issues, ICANN's chief mission.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Beckstrom said that won't be a problem because he saw his job as bringing various constituencies with various expertise together, rather than creating policies himself.

"Our job at ICANN is to facilitate that dialogue and process," he said. "I don't see myself as being the leading source or expert."

Beckstrom, 48, replaces Paul Twomey, ICANN's third and longest-serving chief executive. Twomey, an Australian who became CEO in March 2003, plans to stay with the organization in the newly created position of senior president until the end of the year to help with the transition.

The U.S. government, which funded much of the Internet's early development, selected ICANN in 1998 to oversee policies on domain names — the ".com" and other suffixes that define zones on the Internet.

Based in Marina del Rey, Calif., the nonprofit organization is in the midst of revamping procedures for adding domain name suffixes, a move likely to spawn hundreds or thousands of new Internet addresses in the coming years. A launch, though, has been delayed as objections were raised over such issues as whether trademark owners could wind up having to buy thousands of new domain names simply to protect their intellectual-property rights.

ICANN also is close to allowing entire Internet addresses to be in languages other

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than English for the first time, potentially opening the Web up to more people around the world.

The ICANN board on Friday approved a working group to study uniform requirements for contact information and other data when registering a domain name. Currently, the requirements can vary from suffix to suffix, making it difficult at times to track a domain name owner.

The board also indicated that when new domain names are introduced in any language, the operators of such names won't be able to create redirection services such as the Site Finder service that ".com" operator VeriSign Inc. briefly offered in 2003. Although it helped Internet users find Web sites when they mistype addresses, the company pulled it following complaints that it also broke some Internet tools like spam filters and gave VeriSign an unfair competitive advantage in search.

Beyond creating domain names, ICANN in recent years has expanded its role to tackle security issues, given the importance of domain names in allowing computers to find Web sites and route e-mail. Beckstrom brings some experience there, having served as the first director at the Department of Homeland Security's National Cybersecurity Center, which was formed in 2008.

In March, Beckstrom complained in a blunt resignation letter about a shortage of money for the center and a clash over whether the National Security Agency should control Internet-security efforts.

Previously, Beckstrom served as chairman of Privada Inc., a company that developed Internet privacy technology. He also co-founded software companies and has co-authored four books. And he helped create a global peace network in which corporate chief executives work to promote trade and open borders in conflict areas such as the border between India and Pakistan.

"If we can help bring peace between two warring nuclear nations, as our network did," Beckstrom said, "we may even have a chance between some of the warring factions in the Internet policy front."

Issues before ICANN have often pitted businesses against individual Internet users, and the U.S. government against other nations.

The U.S. government retains oversight of ICANN under an agreement that expires Sept. 30, and some parties, including governments abroad, have pushed for independence.

Beckstrom said his experience as cybersecurity chief should help, even if he didn't leave amicably.

"A lot of people respect me for speaking the truth and being willing to do what is right, even when it's not easy or popular with all parties," he said. "Certainly we will face the same challenges here at ICANN as there are so many competing and

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conflicting demands on the domain names in the world."

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